

REPORT

ON THE HOUSE OF EDUCATION AT AMBLESIDE.

On Saturday, November 26th, 1888, I visited Ambleside for the purpose of inspecting the house of Education which Miss G.M. Mason established there in the month of January in the same year.

DEAR SIR,  
Those hours of travail who have had occasion to engage the services of a Nursery Governess have not unfrequently found cause to regret it. A good nurse thoroughly understands the art of keeping children tidy, happy, and "good." A well educated Governess is able to instruct her scholars with effect. But it has often happened that a Nursery Governess has been found to possess neither the practical skill of the nurse nor the intellectual qualifications of the governess. Miss Mason believed that among other ways of improving domestic education, one of the most important would be to provide a course of training for young ladies which would enable them to act in the capacity of instructor, manager, ~~and companion~~ and companion to children between the ages of five and thirteen. It is certain that while parents not unwisely delegate a part of the training of their children to others, the aid which they may procure is more serviceable in proportion as the governess possesses a sound training in the theory and practice of education.

METHOD. At the time of my visit there were thirteen young ladies undergoing a course of training at the House of Education. The course extends over a year, and is partly theoretical and partly practical. The students are concurrently acquiring principles and methods from competent instructors and applying them in a Practising School. It should be observed that it is no part of the plan of the house of education to supply the students with a ground-work of education.  
~~as far as~~  
It is ~~absolutely~~ <sup>desirable</sup> that the student have already mastered the preliminary knowledge such as is common to all educated people, either at a High School or at a private school or at home.  
The house of education exists for the purpose of studying and applying the

the best methods of teaching, managing, and occupying ~~young~~ children. No student therefore could profit by the training who is not possessed of sufficient mental culture to take up studies of this kind.

My inspection consisted of three divisions.

(1) I was present at the instruction of the children in the practising school by the student teachers.

(2) I witnessed the instruction that was being given to the student teachers by the staff of mistresses attached to the House.

(3) I visited the house in which the students reside and saw the arrangements which have been made for their comfort.

I will describe what I saw under three heads corresponding with the three divisions of my inspection.

(1) The Practising School.

Miss Mason's intention is to train ladies who will teach in a family not those who intend to teach in a school. The teacher in a school must learn how to impart instruction to a number of children of nearly the same age and attainments, that is to take charge of a class. ~~she~~ In a family, on the contrary, the teacher has to deal with a few children of different ages and sex, but less subject to the regulating influences of work in a class. This distinction is obviously one of importance and Miss Mason deals with it in an original way. Instead of being set to teach a class of children of the same age and attainments, the students are placed in charge of a small group of four children composed of boys and girls of various ages. The training of the governesses for the family is thus quite different from that of the teacher for the school. The students are divided into seniors and juniors according to the length of time they have been in the house. Only the seniors are made responsible for the work of a group. These work in pairs and each pair takes charge of a group ~~at a time~~ for one week after the superintendence of Miss Mason.

The Practising School is held in premises known in Amiens as the lecture  
gauze. The use of the rooms is given at a nominal rent by Mr. Bremer who is  
entirely responsible for their existence. They consist of a hall in a few con-  
venient class rooms.

The first lesson which I heard was one on leaves. The age of the children  
to whom it was given was about twelve years. It was illustrated by more than  
twelve different kinds of freshly gathered leaves in a few which had been made into  
specimens. The teacher had a small board and sketcher with facility the  
principal points which she wished to emphasize. Different kinds of leaves were  
exhibited and distinguished according as they had three parts, two parts, or only  
one. Net veined leaves were contrasted with parallel veined, and when the fact  
of the distinction was clearly observed and apprehended by the children, the  
correct name (petiole, stipule etc.) was carefully impressed and not before.  
The second lesson was on net plaiting for children of six. Clumsy and unskilled  
little fingers were taught to interweave strings of paper without tearing them  
so as to form a simple pattern. The task is sufficiently hard to train both the  
hand and the eye, and yet sufficiently easy not to exhaust the patience of the  
most unpractised beginner.

The third lesson was in French. The children were about eight, and the method  
adopted was that of M. Gouin. The children walked towards the door saying as  
they did so, "Je marche vers la porte". By questions they learn to analyse the  
sentence into "je marche", "j'arrive", and "la porte", the door. They reach the door and  
then learn to say "J'arrive à la porte", and as they analyse the sentence into "j'arrive"  
and "à la porte", they then repeat the first action and sentence. By degrees other  
actions and sentences are accumulated, such as knocking, & opening, and closing.  
The children express in a complete sentence an action of some kind while they  
actually perform it, and then separate the sentence into its learning words.  
The four lessons on English Grammar based on the modern analytic treatment,  
a lesson on Natural History, and one in Drawing, which was partly taught by the  
method of narration.

PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION. Having described the practical work of the students with their little groups of children, I will now give examples of the theoretical instruction which was imparted in my presence.

In the large hall I saw the students practise (1) Swedish drill with musical accompaniment, each student learns to lead the drill in turn. (2) Kindergarten games with and without songs, among which I noticed a very pretty French action song, which would develop a sense of the French accent in a pleasant way.

*One of the ~~instructors~~ <sup>garden</sup>*  
~~The chief assistant~~-instructor gave a moral lesson on the sun. The instructress in Kindergarten occupations gave a lesson on Paperfolding, in which she first showed the aim and object of it and then set the students ~~task~~ to fold squares of paper accurately into various ~~forms~~ shapes. This exercise is perhaps the best introduction to elementary notions about space, and simplifies geometrical studies of all kinds. Millie Boudouresque gave a lesson in French. This lesson was oral, the object being to improve the accent rather than to impart a literary knowledge of the language, which most girls possess. I was present at a lesson in physiology and at another in Drawing.

AMONG the specimens of handwork I noticed besides plain and fancy needlework, a variety of basket work.

(3) After inspecting the School, I visited the residence of the students. This was reached by a short walk along a foot path through the meadows, with exquisite views of the grey and cloud covered crags of the lake mountains which rise above the rich tints of the green fern, the vivid green of the pastures and the deep purple of the hollows. The residence of the students is a ~~small~~ house <sup>a good</sup> little way out of Abieside on the road to Rydal. It stands in a ~~small~~ garden, and the sitting rooms command a charming prospect of the lake scenery, putting me in mind of a saying of the late L. Nettleship to the effect that a visit to the lakes was a part of every Englishman's education. I could not help feeling that a year spent in such surroundings would be a kind of education in itself.

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The accommodation in the house appeared to me to be of the kind which most of those who devote themselves to the care of young children in private families would find suited at their disposal. Mrs Parker, who rents the house, arranges with Miss Weston to undertake the burden of house keeping, and it appeared to me that the ladies would find no fault with her share in the institution.

By residing at Ambleside the ladies are enabled to profit by a variety of useful instruction which is provided by the County Council, the Oxford University Extens. Lecturers, and the influence of Mr Huskin on private persons in this literary centre. The students have attended courses on Hygiene, Ambulance, and Nursing which the County Council have started. They have also attended a short course in Physical Geography, given under the auspices of Oxford University.

Competent authorities have conducted walks for the purpose of studying Natural History in the fells. Mrs Firth, who has a large collection of photographs of pictures in the Fine Art Galleries and has studied the literature of art as well, exhibits them to the students and gives a critical exhibition of the works of great artists. In this way Grange Hall has been recently treated much to the pleasure and profit of the audience.

The day of the students is somewhat as follows.

They rise at seven, and after an hour's study take breakfast. The students attend their own rooms before going down to the School, where they spend the morning as I have previously described in learning and teaching. Dinner is £1.80. Rest <sup>at 1 o'clock tea</sup> till recitation follow until four. Time is now found for special study, such as embroidery, needlework and manual training. Tea is served at seven and in the evening the routine is varied by occasional lectures such as I have named in connection with the Universities and County Councils.

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18/6/92

It is right that those heads of families who seek the advantage of assistance in rearing their children should enquire into the social position of those whose help they require. The ladies who are trained at the House of Education are daughters of Clergymen, Officers in the Army, Professional men and Merchants.

Miss Mason has taken special steps to secure that the children in the school shall attain some fixed standard of proficiency. Many parents who educate their children at home are in a state of uncertainty as to how far their children keep pace with other children of their age. Miss Mason has drawn up a syllabus of work for a year showing the extent of the studies of the different children in her practising school. Parents can obtain the syllabus and follow it. Periodical examinations are held in connection with the syllabus and the papers can be procured by any one who joins in this scheme. The papers worked by the children can be sent to Miss Mason for revision. This arrangement enables children who are scattered about in separate families to keep pace as though they were taught in the same school, and hence Miss Mason calls it "The Parents Review School".

I have only to say in conclusion that I was deeply impressed by the earnest and business-like way in which the students in the House of Education addressed themselves to their work, and I do not doubt that they will devote themselves to the care of children with exceptional zeal and knowledge.

T G Cooper  
1<sup>st</sup> XII 92.